# A Report of the Missionary Labours of John Eliot

Brethren

In attempting to discharge the duty I owe to this Society, two considerable difficulties must be encountered. One is, the very contracted account of the labours of this man, which is the best that can at present, be obtained: the other is, the very general and confused nature of this account. These two things have thrown obstacles of no trifling magnitude, in the way, at every step of my progress. And the consideration of these I trust will be a sufficient apology for the brevity and uninteresting nature of this Report.

John Eliot was born in England A.D. 1604. It was his privilege to be under the direction, and to listen to the instructions of pious parents. And even in his old age, he was not forgetful of this inestimable gift of Heaven. Hear his own words, as a proof of this fact, "I do see" says he "that it was a great "favour of God unto me, to season my first times with the fear"

"of God, the word, and prayer." About the year 1624, he entered as a student, the University of Cambridge, which was then distinguished by the title of Emanuel College. Here he pursued a regular course of Education, and was thus prepared to enter upon the public duties of life. Though a love of morality and virtue had characterised his conduct from his infancy, he had not yet felt the regenerating influences of the Spirit of God; nor experienced the pure and heavenly joy which arises from a union with the Saviour of those that believe. Immediately after the completion of his collegiate course, he engaged as an usher in an academy at Baddow near Chelmsford which was in the House and under the direction, of the pious and reverend Thomas Hooker. In this place and by this man, as the means in the hand of God; were the eyes of his understanding opened, to see his situation, and he, made willing to accept of Christ as offered in the gospel. His own account, taking from a manuscript written by himself, concerning this academy and the circumstances that occurred there, will give us a true idea of the matter, Among other things, he says, "To this place I was called, through the infinite Riches"

"of Gods Mercy in Christ Jesus to my poor soul: For here the"
"Lord said unto my dead soul—Live; and through the grace"
"of Christ I do live, and I shall live forever! When I came"
"to this blessed family, I then saw, and never before the power"
"of godliness in its lively vigour and efficacy." His continuance
in this place and in this character was very short. For his unwillingness to adopt the creed and to comply with all the unauthorized and wicked rites which were at this time forced upon the church, and the rejection of which was attended with persecution even unto death, constrained him to devise some plan of safety, and to seek a different country, where he might worship God, agreeably to the dictates of his own conscience — It was towards the close of the year 1629 or in the beginning of 1630, that Eliot was invested with the sacred and highly responsible office of a minister of the Everlasting Gospel — But his native country was unworthy of his labours. Accordingly he determined to cast in his lot, with those who had set their faces towards the uncultivated and inhospitable shores of America: "choosing rather to suffer afflictions with the people of God." if by this means he might live and die, free from the cruel

and unjust restrictions of a wicked and unfeeling Priesthood. A howling wilderness, and an Indians lowly hut, if freedom in religion reigns, were in his estimation preferable to the Gardens and Palaces of Kings, where the conscience is bound down with the chains of tyranical authority.

In 1630 the Massachusets Bay colony sailed from England Their fleet consisted of 10, or Eleven ships, some of which contained 200 passengers. They all arrived safe on the shores of New England before the middle of July, in the same year. I will not detain you Brethren, (as it is not intimately connected with my present purpose) by recounting the sufferings which these pious people endured. In perils in the sea, in perils of robbers, in perils by the heathen in perils in the wilderness — In journeyings often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness, still they persevered, with an humble and unshaken reliance on God. No matter where they settled, their errand into the wilderness was not forgotten. And so great was their zeal for the kingdom and worship of Christ. that in the space of little more than one year, they had 7 well organized and flourishing churches.

Over one of these, viz, that established at Roxbury, within one mile of Boston, Eliot who arrived the next year in 1631, was ordained a Pastor. When he first landed in New England, he preached in a church at Boston, in consequence of the absence of their minister Mr Wilson, who had gone back to England, to complete the settlement of his affairs. It was the intention of this congregation, on the return of Mr Wilson, to make Eliot, his colleague. But Providence had marked out for him a different sphere of action. For it was not far from this time that a select number of his pious friends arrived, to whome before he left his native country, he had promised to devote his labours, provided they should come, previously to his being engaged in the Pastoral care of any other congregation. This company settled at Roxbury. Thither also Eliot was bound to go, and in a short time was ordained over that church, and continued in this relation to them for nearly 60 years —

You are sensible Brethren, that the natives of this country, at the time when these colonies landed on our shores, were among the most miserable of men.

All the obscene and cruel rites, which the natural heart, aided by infernal invention, could devise were practiced by them: From the history of this people at this time, it seems as if the Friends of Hell were in complete possession of them, and reigned in their hearts (I had almost said) without restraint. In this waste and howling wilderness the light of Revelation had never dawned. The ears of the Savage had never been saluted with the sound of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. Eliot saw them and wept —; While his eyes surveyed these wretched outcasts, his heart melted with pity, and he resolved in the strength of the almighty, to exert himself for their souls eternal good. The first thing to be done was to acquire a knowledge of their language. This was a laborious and difficult task, but owing to the ignorance of the Indians, and their aversion to the Europeans it was absolutely necessary, in order to any progress in this great and glorious work. Though arduous and difficult it did not discourage Eliot. His zeal for their conversion, and thus to extend his Masters Kingdom, was

too great to be overcome by any thing short of impossibilities. Accordingly as the first step in the accomplishment of his design, he hired a Native (who could speak English tolerably well) to instruct him. By the assistance of this man, he was enabled to complete sentences in their Language and from these sentences, he would single out, a noun, verb, or any other part of speach, and could then by the help of the native, trace them through all their variations. By laborious and unremitting application in this way, he at length completed a grammar of the Indian Language. At the close of it he wrote the following sentence which is worthy of being remembered and ought to be practiced upon by every believer. "Prayers and Pains thro' faith in Christ Jesus will do any thing." We are not informed of the time, that Eliot commenced his study of the language, but his Biographer, Cotton Mather States that in 1646, he completed his grammar, and was thus prepared to preach the gospel to the poor heathen. It was in this

same year, that he, attended by three other persons made a visit to an assembly of Indians, of whom he requested a meeting at such a time and place, that he might lay before them the things that pertained to their Eternal peace. They accordingly met at a place not far distant from Roxbury, and after a very serious and fervent prayer he preached a sermon from Ezekiel XXXVII. 9. 10. In this discourse were contained the principle articles of the christian religion, after explaining these and applying his subject to the condition of the Indians present, he inquired of them, if "they understood"? And with a general reply they answered, "They understood all." He then began what was his usual method afterwards in treating with them, viz. requesting them to propose such questions to him as they wished to have answered, and he also would propose some for their solution. It is remarked of him, that he commenced his instructions upon such principles as the indians themselves believed and acknowledged: such as that of a Heaven for good, and a Hell for bad people,

when they died. Hear Brethren, let us admire the almighty energy of the life giving spirit of God. When it is commissioned to go forth, the heedlessness of even the american Savage must be turned into great anxiety concearning the salvation of his soul, and his hard and cruel heart feel the softening influences of the love of Immanuel. Behold its influences in the effects produced by this first discourse of the apostle of the Indians. It drew many tears from the eyes, that had been unaccustomed to weeping, and brought forth deep and pungent confessions of sin from the mouths of the most degenerate and wicked men. These effects made an impression upon the mind of Eliot, which could not be effaced. His zeal for labouring in their service grew more ardent and although a regular ordained Pastor over the church at Roxbury, still he could not lay aside the character of an Evangelist. He therfore determined to devote a considerable portion of his time to these poor and wretched outcasts. The particular places in which he laboured from the year 1646 to 1651, are not mentioned in any account to which I have had access. This fact however I think is clearly deducible from the narrative,

that he confined himself to those who resided in and near the town called Natick, also to some who lived east of Roxbury and Boston, together with a tribe who dwelt south of Roxbury towards the sea shore. But Brethren I should be guilty of great injustice did I pass in silence the character of the labours of this man during five years. Though there was no regular church established by him, still there was much effected. The account of his toils of his hardships, of his frequent and exposed journies, of his many and imminent dangers and of his marvellous escapes, is almost incredible. "If, says Cotton Mather, "you briefly would know what he felt, and what carried him through all, take it in his own words in a letter to the honorable Mr Winslow, says he I have not been dry night nor day, from the third day of the week unto the sixth, but so travelled, and at night pull of my boots, wring my stockings and on with them again, and so continue. But God steps in and helps. I have considered the word of God in 2. Timothy II. 3. Endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ." Nor were his time, his toil and his hardships for naught.

He procured the use of schools for these illiterate Indians in which very many were taught to write and read, and some of them, were respectable graduates of Cambridge College. It was also during these five years that he translated the Bible into the Language of the Natives # A work certainly of no common magnitude. Add to this also, a number of other translations, that he made for the use of the Indians, such as Primers, Grammars, Baxters Call to the unconverted &c, and a number of others. Those whom Eliot was made the instrument of converting during these five years, and the number of whom must have been very ~~great~~ considerable as will appear from the succeeding account, were distinguished by the name of "Praying Indians." These at length began to desire the English mode of living. Accordingly at several different places did they combine, and settle. but the town of greatest note was Natick. We have now arrived at the time when this laborious servant of the Lord was employed more particularly, in forming his spiritual children into civilized

# This Bible was printed at Cambridge, and was the first Bible that was printed in America. The whole translation was written with but one pen.

societies, and in constituting churches among them. It was in the year 1651. at Natick, that the Indians first attempted the formation of a civil government. But to Eliot they looked for a plan, and for a code of laws. So great was his desire that they should be a people, in all things ruled by the Lord, that he in pursuance of his plan, expounded unto them the 18th chapt of Exodus, and according to the system therein contained, they proceeded to choose Rulers of hundreds of fifties, of tens, and immediately entered into solemn covenant. Having established themselves upon this foundation, they utterly abandoned that poligamy which had heretofore ben among them. They enacted severe laws against fornication, drunkenness, Sabbath breaking, and many other immoralities, in which, previously to their conversion, they had indulged to an awful degree. They began immediately to "lament after the establishment of a church order, among them, and after the several ordinances and privileges of a church communion." The strictness of the colonies, in their admissions to church fellowship, which required very signal

demonstrations of a repenting and believing soul, was increased rather than diminished, when the Indian converts were examined. A day was therfore set apart, which they called a day of asking Questions, when the Ministers of the adjacent congregations, assisted with all the best interpreters that could be obtained, publickly examined a great number of these Indians, concerning their attainments in knowledge and virtue. This examination gave great joy and satisfaction to all who attended it. Nevertheless that they might proceed with the utmost caution in this important and sacred transaction, they convened the natives in considerable assemblies, in order to have them make open confessions of their Faith in Christ. These confessions were taken in writing from the mouths of the persons, by the ablest interpreters and distributed for the perusal of the pious. This also gave much satisfaction and real pleasure to the people of God. That I may give you a correct idea of the whole of this business in few words, I beg leave to quote a part of a letter

of the pious Richard Mather, published on this occasion. He thus writes. Then is so much of Gods work among them as that I cannot but count it a great evil, yea a great injury to God and his goodness, for any to make light of it. To see and hear Indians opening their mouths and lifting up their hands and eyes in prayer to the living God, calling on him by his name Jehovah, in the mediation of Jesus Christ, and this for a good while together; to see and hear them exhorting one another from the word of God; to see and hear them confessing the name of Christ Jesus, and their own sinfulness; sure this is more than usual! and tho they spoke in a language of which many of us understood but little, yet we that were present that day saw and heard them perform the duties mentioned with such comly reverence in their gesture, and their whole carriage, and with such pleanty of tears trickling down the cheeks of some of them, as did argue to us that they spake with the holy Fear of God, and it much affected our Hearts. ——— Having thus passed through all parts of trial required they were constituted

a regular church of Christ, and Eliot proceeded to baptize them and their children and to administer the Sacrament of the Lords supper. Behold Brethren this interesting scene. The roving savage has settled down in the enjoyments of civilization and Christianity. Instead of surrounding some unhappy victim of his barbarous cruelty and indulging in the mad pleasure of infernal tormentors, see him seated at the table of the Lord and with a true faith in Christ, accompanied with a joyful hope of a glorious immortality, receiving the pledges of a saviours Love. — But I cannot dwell on this part of my subject. After the constitution of the church at Natick, he proceeded in his labours of love, and collected 4 Indian assemblies in the neighbouring places, which were not in regular church orders, but who enjoyed the preaching of the Gospel, once every fort night from Eliot, until he was weakened with Labours and age so that he did not preach oftener than one in two months. They were however much engaged in the cause of Christ, in learning

the principles of his holy religion, and very diligent as well as fervent in the duty of prayer — In the year 1666 Eliot attended by the Governor and several of the Magistrates, and ministers of Plymouth Colony, collected a vast number of Indians, at a town called Mashippang, about 50 miles from Boston. Out of this number there were many who professed a living faith in Christ, yet such was the strictness of the people, that before they would admit them into Church Fellowship, these confessions were ordered to be written down and sent to every church in the Colony for their approbation. The result of this was highly favourable to the Indians, who in the presence and by the consent of all the clergymen in Plymouth Colony, became a church and chose a Mr Bourn, to be their Pastor, who was then ordained by Eliot & Cotton his colleague at this time in the labours of the Indian Mission. Besides the church established at Mashippang, there were 5 assemblies of chatecumens in its neighbourhood. Over each of these congregations one of the natives was appointed an overseer. From this place our apostle with Mr Cotton, went over to —

Matthews Vinyard. Here the good work of evangelising the heathen had been begun and carried on to a considerable extent by the Mahews particularly. and by some others. Eliot however succeeded in gathering a very large and very respectable church. Over this church there was one Pastor, one Teacher and two Ruling Elders appointed. The distance at which some of the members lived from others, was thought to be a good cause, for dividing it, which was done by mutual consent, the Pastor and one Ruling Elder taking one part, and the Teacher and one Ruling Elder the other. The work of the Lord in this island was great. So early as the year 1685. there were 16. hundred souls who gave satisfactory evidence that their profession of Faith was not a vain one. They were so exact in their admission, so solemn in their discipline and so serious in their communion, that some of the christian english in the Neighbourhood, who would have been loath to have mingled with them in a civil relation, yet have gladly done it in a Sacred one. From Matthews Vinyard our Evangelist proceeded to Nantucket an adjacent Island. Here he also succeeded in the constitution of another very respectable church. The same character that was given of those last mentioned will apply

to this. And besides those who made an open profession of Faith in Christ, many through his influence or rather through the influence of the Spirit of God by him, were persuaded to meet at stated times for Prayer, and hearing the principles of Christianity explained. The effects of these societies were salutary, not only on those who attended them but upon all the natives of the Island. Having finished his labours in these places he returned again to the main Land and paid a visit to the Indians at Saconet in Plymouth Colony. Here the Lord blessed him in a remarkable degree. He soon collected a numerous and respectable congregation of converted Indians, who were pre eminently distinguished by the title of "Praying Indians" There was nothing to distinguish this people from those of different towns, except their great zeal in religion and the fervour of their Love to Christ Jesus, which two circumstances gave them their title. Eliots last labours as an Evangelist, were with a tribe of Indians who lived near Cape Cod. Here his usual success did not attend him, still however he had abundant reasons to rejoice and to bless God for what his eyes saw even among these people. Some he did

not succeede in establishing a church. But he did collect and establish 6 congregations of catechumens, and over each of these appointed an Indian preacher. This certainly was no inconsiderable step, in the execution of his great and good work. It tended very much to their civilization, and many of them it is hopefully believed, felt the saving operations of the spirit of God on their hearts.

From the whole of this account, it appears, that by the instrumentality of Eliot and by his unwearied and constant exertions in the cause of the American Heathen there were gathered and regularly constituted 6 churches of baptized Indians, 18 assemblies of catechumens professing the name of Christ & 24 of the natives who laboured and preached successfully for the Lord.

To the service of these Eliot devoted 40 years of his life, nor did he during this time neglect the people of his charge at Roxbury, but used all possible means for their growth in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. It was the universal custom of the Indian churches and assemblies of catechumens, to meet for worship twice every Lords day. The Pastor always began with prayer, after

which the whole congregation joined in singing praise to God
At the end of this the preacher read a part of the scriptures
and expounded it, drawing from the portion read, some
doctrine and practical remarks. The whole was then con-
cluded by Prayer. They observed, no days as holy, but the
Sabbath, except upon some extraordinary occasions, and
solemnly set apart whole days either in giving Thanks,
Fasting or Prayer: all of which services were performed
with the greatest fervour and devotion. It may be said
with strict propriety, that the Indians were among the
most rigid in their discipline, the most exemplary in
their conduct and the most engaged in the cause of
their Master, of all the New England churches. Such
were the fruits of his labours which this Apostle of the
Indians saw before his death. He was greatly blessed
in the undertaking which he had espoused, and was
able to style many of the nations his children in the
Faith. A great number of these were called before him,
to receive the rewards of the Blessed but the time at length

arrived when he too was permitted to depart and be with Christ. For a year or two previously to his death, finding that he had not strength to perform the duties of a minister, he resigned that office, both in regard to his people at Roxbury, and to the Indian churches. But when every mortal part was dying, the Grace of this excellent man revived and grew brighter and brighter. — Brethren I cannot close this Report, without mentioning two circumstances which seem to me, to add new lustre to the character of Eliot. Having arrived to the 85th year of his age, and being unabled as he supposed to do or say any thing for the edification of either the English or the Aboriginal Indians, he turned his particular attention, toward the poor and much neglected negroes, in their instruction. He accordingly agreed with such persons as resided within two or three miles of his house and held slaves, that they should send them to him once every week, and that he would instruct them to the

best of his abilities, in the things of their eternal peace. He continued in this labour of love, as long as it pleased God to give him strength, so that when he relinquished it, he was almost ready to give up the ghost. But while life continued he must be active in his Masters service. When he was no longer able to instruct the negroes, he took a boy who in his infancy had fallen into the fire, and burnt himself, so that he was perfectly blind: and taught him the English and Latin Languages so that he would correct any mistakes made by persons who read in his hearing. Nor did he cease to instruct this blind youth until his own eyes were about to be closed in death. A few days previously to his departure, he fell into a kind of languishment attended with a Fever, which hastened him rapidly to the close of his pilgrimage. But he was prepared. Having fought a good fight, having finished his course and kept the faith, he was now ready to go and receive that crown of Glory, which the Lord the right-

eous Judge was waiting, to place upon his head—
The last words that linguered on his quivering
lip were "Welcome Joy" and Eliot expired—
His death was in 1690. consequently in the 86th
year of his age—"Blessed is that servant, whome his
master when he comes shall find so doing."—

See Cotton Mathers Life of Eliot
as contained in his Magnalia &c.

By Halsey A Wood

January 1st 1815